

NURSING STUDENTS: ONA IS HERE FOR YOU



The Ontario Nurses' Association is Your Union

Along with the entire Board of Directors of the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA), the largest provincial nurses' union in Canada, I thank you for pursuing a career in such a valuable profession as nursing, and warmly welcome you as a student affiliate member.

Throughout our 50-plus years, ONA has recognized that students are not only the future of our profession, but our union. Our members overwhelmingly made that official at our 2008 Biennial Convention, amending our Constitution to establish this classification for Ontario members of the Canadian Nursing Students' Association (CNSA). That means most provincial nursing students – currently 18,000 – are affiliate members of ONA, joining our 68,000 registered nurse and health-care professional members providing care in hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, the community, clinics and industry. We really *are* everywhere!

This student affiliate membership is truly a two-way street. It provides ONA with a unique opportunity to hear directly from students about your biggest challenges, such as clinical placements, and, in turn, you receive the support of a powerful union to help address them. You have my word that ONA will remain committed to this unparalleled partnership.

We are seeing a new and exciting movement of nurses throughout the province coming together with one strong, collective voice to demand needed changes to our work lives and public health-care system, and I strongly encourage you to become part of that. Learning more about the services your union provides by turning the page is a great place to start!

Erin Ariss, RN
Provincial President

JUST WHAT IS A UNION?

That's a question we get asked a lot by students – and with several other nursing organizations in the province providing very different services, the confusion is understandable.

Basically, a union is an organized group of workers who come together with one collective voice to negotiate the conditions of their work with the employer, such as wages, hours, benefits, and health and safety. It's the very definition of solidarity.

Another common question from students? *How can I become a member of ONA when I start my nursing career?* Well, that happens automatically when you begin working at an employer where ONA is the bargaining agent. A non-unionized group may also wish to organize with ONA, and there is a clear process for that, culminating in a vote of those involved.

However our members come to us, they have access to a vast array of services for their monthly dues – democratically determined at our Biennial Conventions – from “traditional” core union work such as contract negotiations and grievance handling to services you might not immediately associate with a union, including educational offerings, financial assistance and political action.

The biggest benefit of all, though, is knowing that whatever you may be faced with throughout your nursing career, you will have a highly respected and supportive union behind you.

18,000

ONA STUDENT AFFILIATE MEMBERS

By getting involved, you can help ensure we achieve even more successes in the future.

2008

THE YEAR ONA'S STUDENT AFFILIATE MEMBERSHIP BEGAN

WHY GET INVOLVED WITH ONA?

It's Free

Because you are a nursing student not yet working in the profession, you are not charged monthly dues to take part in and access the benefits of your union. It's completely free!

It's Your Right

As an ONA student affiliate member, you have the right to participate in the activities of your union – and what better way to start than by attending a meeting at the Bargaining Unit, Local, regional, and/or provincial levels? You will learn so much about the work of ONA – and we would love to have you there.

Contact the ONA Regional Vice-President for your nursing school (see back page) to learn how you can join in. They, along with the Provincial President, First Vice-President and Provincial Treasurer, want to hear from you! You can also use the "Find My Bargaining Unit President" tool at ona.org/bup to search for a Bargaining Unit President (the elected leader for ONA members at a particular employer) at your clinical placement. They would like to get to know you too!

Together We're Strong, Together We Win

Your issues are our issues. It's really that simple.

That's why the ONA Board of Directors and staff regularly liaise with nursing students. We connect with CNSA's official and associate delegates for each campus during the school year and attend the CNSA's annual Ontario-Quebec regional and national conferences, which ONA also proudly sponsors, to meet nursing students in person.

Information gleaned from those conversations is invaluable, allowing us to bring your concerns forward to the government and other decision-makers who recognize ONA as the voice of front-line nurses in our province.

For example, in partnership with the CNSA, ONA raises the hurdles nursing students and recent graduates face. These include challenging learning conditions, lack of mentorship, the burden of costly post-secondary education, lack of mental health support, skyrocketing cost of living, mandatory unpaid placements and increasing levels of debt.

ONA's advocacy to the government includes increased financial support that matches tuition and living cost increases and the conversion of mandatory unpaid internships into fully-paid clinical placements, and a proven and cost-effective policy proposal to attract and retain new nursing graduates and address the nursing shortage in Ontario.

With the nursing shortage at an all-time high, we also continue to push for the creation of a late career initiative for recently retired nurses and those with decades of experience to mentor nursing students, and to ensure those students are not used to fill staffing gaps with excessive unpaid placements.

We are confident we will prevail on all these issues!

The unfair three-write maximum for the controversial NCLEX entry-to-practice exam is proof of how we can succeed together. We took that battle straight to the government on your behalf, and the limit was revoked. ONA also supported the judicial review launched by the Canadian Federation of Students and York Federation of Students over the government's Student Choice Initiative, which allowed post-secondary students to opt out of essential fees for campus groups/clubs, newspapers, etc., putting the very fate of CNSA chapter schools at risk. Together, we won that too, with the Ontario Divisional Court striking the initiative down.

By getting involved, you can help ensure we achieve even more successes in the future to improve patient care and your experiences as a nursing student.



You have two levels of representation: From the official and associate delegates for your CNSA chapter school, and from the experienced union members on the ONA Board of Directors.

**STAY IN THE
KNOW ABOUT
ONA AT**
ona.org/news

We Ensure You're Safe so Your Patients Can be too

As you embark on your nursing career, we're guessing that providing high quality patient care tops your priority list. Sadly, nurses sometimes find themselves with excessive workloads and unsafe patient care environments due to harmful employer practices and policies, which can make achieving that goal challenging.

But ONA has unique language in our collective agreement – the *Professional Responsibility Clause* – that gives nurses the power to protect their patients and meet their standards of practice (with the support of ONA's professional practice specialists) when something just isn't right. The clause is clear. It works. And you won't find it anywhere else.

Read about ONA's professional practice services and successes at ona.org/pp.

Need a (Financial) Helping Hand?

Post-secondary education is expensive, we know that. But ONA is here to help lessen the burden.

In fact, each year ONA provides up to nine \$1,000 scholarships and one \$2,000 Reese Fallon Memorial Scholarship to nursing students who are immediate family members of an ONA member.

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions also offers one Ontario scholarship through ONA. Find out about eligibility requirements and deadlines at ona.org/bursaries.

ONA is also part of the Registered Nurses' Foundation of Ontario, a charitable organization that provides financial support for nurses and nursing students to help them further their educational studies.

Check them out at RNFOO.org.

Tell us Your Stories

We know you have powerful stories about being a nursing student – plenty, we bet – and we want to hear about them.

In 2025, ONA launched a fierce digital magazine, cheekily named F-Word (onamag.org) to reflect all the f-words that have been bandied about to describe our union and members since our 2023 brand renewal. The site allows members and students to share honest realities and lived experiences without the filters and sugarcoating (and anonymously, if needed).

Send your submissions and story ideas to onamag.org/contact.



Human Rights are Your Rights

Everyone has the right to work in an environment free from discrimination and harassment. No organization believes that more than ONA.

It's why we have a dedicated provincial Human Rights and Equity (HRE) Team made up of ONA members from five equity-deserving groups and allies, and a member-driven Anti-Racism Advisory Team. It's why we established an Anti-Racism, Equity and Human Rights Board Committee. It's why we issued a strongly-worded Anti-Racism Position Statement with concrete actions and a Declaration on Truth and Reconciliation. It's why we hold a hugely popular HRE Summit every year to promote inclusivity. It's why leaders voted on an amendment to ONA's Constitution to add an HRE representative to the Local Executive Committee. It's why we acknowledge and participate in dozens of HRE observances throughout the year, including Black History/Black Futures Month, International Women's Day and Pride. And it's why we invite you to commemorate these events alongside us.

Read about our strong commitment to HRE at ona.org/hre.

GET TO KNOW YOUR ONA BOARD MEMBERS

(They want to get to know you!)



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• Sault College



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PORTFOLIO:

Occupational Health and
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• St. Lawrence College
• Trent University/Fleming
College
• University of Ottawa/
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PORTFOLIO:

Human Rights and Equity
• Centennial College
• George Brown College
• Humber College
• Ontario Tech University
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PORTFOLIO:

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• University of Western
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ONA Education is for You too

ONA provides a plethora of education workshops for personal and professional development – and the best part is they're free!

Want to gain a better understanding of your union, develop leadership skills or learn about nurses' rights under our collective agreements? Sign up for an ONA workshop. Want to enhance your understanding of your professional responsibility or how government legislation affects nurses' working lives? ONA education can help with that too. Find the perfect program(s) for you on our workshop calendar at access.ona.org/calendar. Many workshops are held digitally.

Unable to attend a specific workshop? No problem! Many courses are also available online, so you can complete them where and when it's convenient. Set up your own ONA eLearning account at elearning.ona.org and start learning today.



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